Description:

This course explores the history of food from ancient times to the present. It has no prerequisites, and can be taken in lieu of a more general history survey course (or at the same time). The course is divided into two parts, the first focused on ancient food practices up to the fifteenth century, and the second half on food in the modern world. In the first part of the course we will learn about major turning points in foodways and how religion, migration, and trade shaped what people ate. In the second half we will cover the industrialization of food systems, the rise of fast food and restaurants, and the role of food in shaping ethnic, class, and gender identities. Throughout the course students will have opportunities to explore topics of particular interest and learn more about the history of specific foods and drinks here in Eugene and beyond.

Learning Objectives:

You can expect to understand the following after taking this class:

- How foods and eating have been intertwined with religious beliefs and national, class, ethnic, and gender identities
- How cultural interactions between peoples and regions have altered practices of food production, distribution, and consumption
How the production, distribution, and consumption of food have shaped, and been shaped by the natural environment
• How modern societies have transformed eating practices
• How to engage in critical discussions about the ways in which food shapes identity
• How to hone writing and interpretive skills through careful readings of sources, research assignments, and exams

Grade Breakdown:

Paper – 15%
Midterm Exam – 20%
Final Exam – 30%
Reading Quizzes – 15%
Food Autobiography – 10%
Discussion Group Participation – 10%

Required Texts:

Paul Freedman, ed., Food: The History of Taste
Jeffrey M. Pilcher, Planet Taco: A Global History of Mexican Food
Mark Kurlansky, Salt
(Other readings are posted in the Modules section of Canvas.)

Class Schedule:

Week 1: Food in Ancient History

Tuesday, April 3: A Matter of Taste? Hunters, Gatherers, and the first Fire-makers


Thursday, April 5: Gifts of the Gods: Food in Ancient Greece and Rome
Week 2: Tea, Rice, and Salt: Cuisines of Early China & Egypt

Tuesday, April 17: Imperial China
Readings: Food, 99-109; Salt, Chapter 1

Thursday, April 19: Ancient Egypt & African Foodways
Reading: Salt, Chapter 2

Week 3: Food in the Middle Ages: Religion, Diet, and Health

Tuesday, April 10: “Hold the Ham”: Why Jews and Muslims don’t eat Pork

Thursday, April 12: Feasting and Fasting: Early Christian Cuisine

Week 4: Colonization and Commercialization: The Columbian Exchange

Tuesday, April 24: New World Foods

Thursday, April 26: New Worlds, New Tastes – The Renaissance

DUE: FOOD AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Week 5: Sugar and Slavery

Tuesday, May 1:

Thursday, May 3:
MID-TERM EXAM

Week 6: Industrialization of Food

Tuesday, May 8: Consumerism and the Modern Diet
Readings: Food, 233-261; Rachel Laudan, “Birth of the Modern Diet” (Canvas)

Thursday, May 10: “In Meat we Trust” The Meat-Packing Industry

Week 7: Migration, Food, and War

Tuesday, May 15: Immigration and Ethnic Cuisine in America
Reading: Excerpts, 97 Orchard (Canvas); Planet Taco, chapter 2

Thursday, May 17: World War II
DUE: Assignment

Week 8: Let’s Eat Out

Tuesday, May 22: Restaurants and Public Eateries
Reading: Food, 301-331

Thursday, May 24: McDonaldization

Week 9: Case Study: Mexican Cuisine

Tuesday, May 29: Food and Gender
Reading: Planet Taco, chapters 3 & 4

Thursday, May 31: Globalization and the Fight over “Authenticity”
Reading: Planet Taco, chapter 6

Week 10: Modern Issues in Food History

Tuesday, June 5: Mass Consumption and the Environment
Reading: Excerpts, Raj Patal, Stuffed and Starved (Canvas)

Thursday, June 7: Body Image and Food - Too Fat, Too Thin